

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH MAJOR GENERAL DAVID SPRYNCZNATYK, ADJUTANT GENERAL, NORTH DAKOTA NATIONAL GUARD, VIA TELECONFERENCE SUBJECT: ARMY NATIONAL GUARD OPERATIONS IN SUPPORT OF NORTH DAKOTA FLOOD VICTIMS TIME: 12:00 P.M. EDT DATE: THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 2009

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LINDY KYZER (Army Public Affairs): This is Lindy Kyzer with Army Public Affairs. Thank you so much, everyone, for joining us. We are absolutely thrilled to have with us this morning Major General David Spryncznatyk.

GEN. SPRYNCZNATYK: No, no, no, no, no.

MS. KYZER: Spryncznatyk -- oh, sir! Sorry.

GEN. SPRYNCZNATYK: Thank you.

MS. KYZER: He is the adjutant general of the North Dakota National Guard. He's currently on the ground in North Dakota in the flood regions. He's taking the time to discuss current Army National Guard operations there. So with that, I will go ahead and turn it over to you, sir, for a couple of minutes of opening remarks.

GEN. SPRYNCZNATYK: Well, thank you. And I really appreciate everyone joining us this morning, quite frankly, helping us to tell the nation what has taken place here and how we continue to fight and take care of our people in North Dakota.

One caveat, Lindy. In your opening comments, you said Army National Guard. This is the National Guard because we have literally crews and airmen on the ground that have, you know, have come to our aid, if you will, in responding to the flood that, you know, I have categorized as epoch in nature just because of the area it's covered and the volume of water that has moved through the Red River Valley and the response that, you know, has been necessary to help local officials to support, you know, the communities, the counties, the people that, you know, have been impacted and continue to be impacted by the flood event.

Just a little bit of background. Just this past winter here in North Dakota, we've had record snowfall. And as a result, you know, at the first of the year, you know, I pulled together some of my staff to address how we would fight this flood, not knowing at the time what its magnitude would be and certainly not knowing, you know, where the greatest area of impact would be. So we went through an extensive planning exercise, as we call it a military decision-making exercise, to ensure that whatever was asked of us we would be prepared for.

I'll be honest with you. As we went through that exercise, none of us imagined what the scale of the event would be across the state. Much of the focus in the last week, two weeks, I guess, has been in the Fargo-Cass County area. That's our largest area of population. And that county, that community has, I think, approximately 110,000 people. And you know, for us, that's about 15 percent of our state's population. So a lot of the publicity, literally worldwide, has focused on Fargo.

But having said that, you know, our effort has been statewide. We've had a number of communities across the state, you know, all the way from the southwest corner of the state to the east and to the north that have been impacted by record floods. And what we have done as a National Guard, you know, at the direction of the governor, we have done everything we can to bring together the resources, the equipment, the people to assist those communities. Over a matter of about I think it was five maybe six days, we went from zero people on state active duty to over 2,400. And as we ramped up to that 2,400 and put the call out to other states, we had about 400 people, soldiers and airmen, come to us from Minnesota, South Dakota, Montana, Wisconsin, Iowa and Missouri. And South Dakota was the major contributor to that 400 number. In addition to, you know, personnel, some of them brought aviation assets, and that became a big part of our ability to, you know, do aerial reconnaissance, to do search and rescue, to, you know, to carry out a unique mission where we placed one-ton sandbags, and in another instance we placed natural salt on some of the ice sheets to, you know, prevent ice jams.

And you know, I can't say enough about how proud I am of all of the soldiers and airmen that did respond to the call. You know, probably the best example is how South Dakota responded. Last week, Thursday, a week ago today, we put out a call through what's called EMAC, Emergency Management Assistance Compact, for a couple hundred soldiers or airmen to come, you know, to help us as we were patrolling dikes and, you know, filling and distributing and placing sandbags and providing for security. South Dakota was the first to respond. Others did, but South Dakota was the first that said, you know, we'll be there, tell us when and where.

We made an arrangement with them. They literally called their people in the middle of the night. I talked to soldiers in this case that, you know, I got a call at 2:00 in the morning, you know, 2:30, 3(:00), 3:30, and they were told, you know, to report to the armory by 7:00, and they did. And then, you know, shortly thereafter were on the road. And by late afternoon, you know, they were in the Fargo- Cass County area. And as I talked to those, you know, young men and women in uniform, you know, without exception, they were all, you know, proud to have an opportunity to be a part of the fight. As I've told all of our soldiers and airmen in the National Guard, they made a huge difference for the people of North Dakota, and it was great to see the response, to see the spirit, to see that, you know, these folks that are all volunteers, that these folks knew that they were a very significant part of our effort to protect lives and property. And as I said just a minute ago, it made a huge difference for the lives of people of eastern North Dakota.

I'm representing North Dakota. And as I said, there were, you know, six other states that contributed through the National Guard. Minnesota, the state of Minnesota itself, also had Guard members on duty, fighting the flood on the east side of the Red River. So that's, you know, just a snapshot of sort of, you know, what we did and how we ramped up.

Some of the things we did, some of the unique things, if you will, that we did, you know, the one-ton sandbags that were placed from Black Hawk helicopters, you know, really were a very efficient and effective means of a quick response in areas that, you know, we couldn't just get to by traditional means. And one of the other things we did, and this isn't unique by any means but it certainly was a good-news story for us, you know, as we fought this flood in this metropolitan area, for us, you know, we established quick reaction forces that were stationed at schools, at fire stations, at churches. And when, you know, when there was an issue, a problem, a breach in the dike, you know, these quick reaction forces did just that. They quickly got to the scene. They had the trucks loaded with sand, with sandbags, with other material. Many of the trucks are, you know, running literally 24 hours a day, so there was no issue of, you know, being able to start them and get to the scene. Our folks would hope in, soldiers and airmen both, away they would go. And they would do their thing.

And what was neat about it, too, was the support that we got from the community.

One of the places I stopped yesterday was the Olivet Lutheran Church. And one of our quick reaction forces was stationed there the last several days. And the people from within that church community were so proud and pleased that, you know, that they could host our folks. And I'll tell you what, if you want to get a good meal, go to the Olivet Lutheran Church because the church ladies and men do a great job of cooking meals that I can guarantee our folks gained weight over the last several days.

But that's just a, you know, quick synopsis I'd say of some of the things we did and, you know, what our role and mission was and, you know, how we were received by the community. And you know, although the news from North Dakota has sort of slowed in the last few days, only because the crest moved through the Fargo-Cass County area, we still have other communities downstream - - in that case, downstream is to the north -- that are preparing for that first flood crest. And we have our folks out there helping them, and we know that we're going to get a second crest at Fargo in about 10 days. And you know, we'll be back there making sure that, you know, we can do, we have the capability to do whatever is asked of us to support civilian authorities.

MS. KYZER: Excellent, sir, and I do apologize. I have an Army-centric mentality, but I think that's definitely one of the benefits of the National Guard and things that we're really proud of is the one-team, one-fight mentality. So I can't underscore our airmen, so thank you for pointing that out.

We'll go ahead and take questions now. We'll start with Beth Wilson. Did you have a question?

Q Good morning, General. Thank you so much for taking the time to be with us. I just wanted to first clarify some numbers. You have 2,400 total or 2,400 plus the 400 from the other states?

GEN. SPRYNCZNATYK: It's 2,400 total. We had, you know, approximately 2,000 soldiers and airmen from North Dakota and then, you know, about 400 from those other six states that I mentioned.

Q Can you tell me, were members of the National Guard affected by this? And how are their families doing in light of this? I marvel at National

Guard families. They are so amazing that they can send off their service member and keep the home fires going in the midst of a crisis.

GEN. SPRYNCZNATYK: We have had soldiers and airmen impacted in the Fargo area. I know of one family and one airmen in particular who, you know, lost the fight about a week ago and lost his home. And you know, others, too. I think that was the only -- I hope this is true -- I think that was the only single instance where someone, one of our people, one of our soldiers, airmen, lost everything, so to speak. But I've also talked to several others that have had, you know, have been fighting the floods, building sandbag levees around their house, getting help from, you know, other soldiers and airmen and neighbors. And you know, the damage to their homes has been minimal.

We, as you know, within the National Guard, you know, just like within the active component, we have a very strong family program. And we have had, you know, our family support personnel, volunteers as well as those that, you know, are on a paid status, work with our soldiers and airmen, help them, you know, take care of any issues or problems that, you know, they might have at home directly as a result of floodwaters. And also, you know, as you pointed out, you know, our people leave home, leave the job and, you know, there have been instances where, you know, we've had to help out others because their soldier, their airman is across the state. And we want to make sure -- from my perspective, I don't care if they're deployed to eastern North Dakota or, you know, to eastern Afghanistan, we're going to take care of our families back home and also do everything we can to ensure that employers are taken care of recognized.

Q Wonderful. Thank you, sir.

MS. KYZER: And Todd Lopez with Army News, did you have a question?

Q Good morning, General. I have a question. We hear a lot about the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. And I think people think that folks in uniform that that's their primary focus. But the National Guard's focus, or at least maybe you can tell me about the importance of their mission in their home states. What is the importance of that and the significance of being able to perform the things that the governors want them to do?

GEN. SPRYNCZNATYK: Well, you're absolutely right in that we have an important mission here. The beauty of the National Guard is that, you know, we are citizen soldiers. We have two primary missions, and one is a federal mission, and that's to defend the nation and, you know, do what's required of us, you know, by the president. And then we also have the state mission and there, of course, we serve the governor as the commander in chief on a day-to-day basis. And whenever there's any sort of disaster or emergency, the governor has the ability to turn to the Guard and, you know, direct resources to help, you know, the citizens of his or her state. We in North Dakota, of course, you know, primary focus in recent months has been the flood fight. But if you go back in time, not that far, earlier this winter, we had members of the National Guard assisting counties in keeping their roads open because of all the snow. Last year, we had people on duty after or during, I should say, some fires in some of the rangelands in the west. And then we also, it wasn't long ago, we had a tornado that devastated a community. And within 24 hours, we had people onboard in that community, helping and providing for safety for the citizens and, you know, some of the cleanup because it was necessary, you know, to provide access.

And you'll appreciate this, too. We sent a Public Affairs team there to help that community because the community only had 750 residents, and they were literally overwhelmed by media from around the country. So that was just another instance where we, you know, provided assistance, you know, to the people of, in this instance, Northwood.

Also, earlier I mentioned the EMAC, Emergency Management Assistance Compact. And there, too, just like, you know, the people came to our aid, last summer we sent some of our aviation assets out to California to, you know, help fight some of the many fires that, you know, devastated communities in California. So you know, the Guard is a great organization. Obviously, I'm biased. But when you think about what we have, you know, to offer in terms of defending the nation and defending the homeland back in the states and working with our neighbors and sharing resources, the Guard is a tremendous asset to the people of this nation.

MS. KYZER: Excellent. And I'll open it to any other questions out there.

Q Sir, can you also touch on, will any of the soldiers or airmen in the North Dakota National Guard be deploying overseas anytime soon? Are any of the units there preparing for deployment?

GEN. SPRYN CZNATYK: Yeah. As a matter of fact, unfortunately I was not able to be a part of the send-off ceremony last Friday for a small contingent of Army aviation folks that will be going. They're going to Djibouti, you know, to work in the Gulf region. And they'll be leaving in a week's time. Right now, we only have a handful of soldiers and airmen overseas, and by a handful, less than 100. And some of them are in Afghanistan. We have what's called a (raid ?) detachment in Afghanistan. We have airmen in Iraq and soldiers in Iraq, too, that volunteered for an extended tour, some in Kuwait, some in Qatar. So you know, we do have some folks deployed overseas right now.

One of the things that's facing us -- this is kind of interesting. I just thought of this. In 2009 it's going to be a very significant year in the history of the North Dakota National Guard. We have just gone through the largest single deployment of soldiers and airmen within the state, you know, to address a disaster. Later this summer, we're going to have the largest single deployment at any one time of soldiers overseas, and that will be to Kosovo. In August of this year, over 700 of our North Dakota Army National Guard members -- unfortunately, they wouldn't let me send Air Guard members along, and that's a rub there for me. But anyway, over 700 of our soldiers will be going to Kosovo. We will be the lead element, the command and control, you know, for this country's service to the country of Kosovo. We're going to be joined by 700 other Guard members from other states and roughly 800 soldiers from other nations just to, you know, provide for that peacekeeping mission in Kosovo.

So you know, our people -- we've had in total over 4,400 mobilizations and deployments, you know, from the North Dakota National Guard since 9/11. And for some of those 4,400, you know, for many of them there have been second deployments, for some third, and for a handful there's been a fourth and a fifth deployment.

So we've been very much engaged worldwide since 9/11. We continue, you know, to be a part of, you know, what our nation is doing overseas in that regard. And you know, right now, we're focusing more so on the home front.

MS. KYZER: Excellent. Any other questions?

Well, I have one. I have a couple, three Twitters, so I'll go ahead and ask those and give folks on the line time to think if they have any final questions.

But I don't know if this is serious or not, but I'm curious now so I'm going to ask it. The question is, General, what happens to all the used sandbags after the flood?

GEN. SPRYNCZNATYK: We have a huge rummage sale. (Laughs.) You know, if you need sandbags, give me a call, and I'll tell you where to pick them up. The fact is, you know, when the floodwaters have receded, you know, the communities are primarily responsible for the cleanup. Contractors will go in and, you know, pull out the sandbags. And most of them will go into landfills. There really isn't anything you can do after a sandbag has been used. And you know, if you can imagine in Fargo, they built over 3 million, almost 3.5 million sandbags. And that was a sight to be seen, too. You know, they had sandbag central, and you'd go there, and there would be literally thousands of volunteers. And we had soldiers and airmen there, too, filling those bags. In one day, they produced over 500,000 sandbags, which is an incredible number. And you know, they distribute them throughout the community and place them. So we will have a huge cleanup ahead of us. You know, the sandbags will be removed, and they'll be disposed of properly.

MS. KYZER: Excellent. And then another question from Twitter. And again, I'm not sure if you can speak to this but I'll throw it out there. And if not, you know, we can just defer the question. But someone is wondering if there were ever any thoughts or plans for Fargo to dig a diversion canal like Winnipeg has.

GEN. SPRYNCZNATYK: Well, there have been. And you know, I can speak to that with a little bit of authority because for 29 years I worked in water resources in the state and headed up, you know, what we call our state water commission. So I was involved in the past and watching what's happened recently. The answer is yes, you know, we have and the communities along the Red River looked at the possibility of a diversion channel. What we are doing right now -- and when I say we, the state of North Dakota working hand-in-hand with the state of Minnesota -- is we're beginning to look at a more comprehensive, permanent flood control project.

And when we talk about a comprehensive flood control project, it won't be just a diversion because a diversion in itself does create some other issues upstream, downstream in particular. And meeting with the city of Fargo officials yesterday, you know, it was agreed we need to look at what more we can do in terms of storage upstream, levees in some areas, and if a diversion is a part of the comprehensive flood control project, so be it.

So the direct answer to that question is yes, it has been talked about. And secondly, it is, you know, it is just one element of discussion right now that pertains to comprehensive flood control.

MS. KYZER: Okay, thank you.

Q General, you said in 10 days you expect a second crest. Is that right?

GEN. SPRYNCZNATYK: That's correct. Here's what's happened. We have had -- well, it's been a record-breaking-snowfall winter for us. And you know, the crest that moved through the Fargo-Cass County area just a few days ago was the first crest from the initial snow melt. What happened then is that we had some colder weather move our way. Right now, we're probably about 15 degrees below normal. And what's happening at night is we're getting a pretty significant freeze, during the day it, you know, starts to warm up and melt. So because of the cold weather that, you know, that moved our way in the last week or so, that put a damper on some of the water that was moving towards these areas of concern.

Then to top it off, on Monday of this week, Monday and Tuesday I think it was, we had, if you can believe it, another, I think in the area upstream of Fargo, nearly 17 inches of snow. So the good news is that was very dry snow, if there is such a thing. But you know, that on top of what was, more or less, held in place by the cold weather is expected to, you know, move towards Fargo and towards the other communities in about 10 days time. So you know, even though the communities did an outstanding job fighting the flood in the first go around, even though that flood crest is behind us, in many areas we still remain vigilant, watching what's taking place. And we still remain prepared to, you know, support the communities as that second crest makes its way to Fargo, Cass County and elsewhere.

Right now, it's expected in about 10 to 12 days, and it's all totally weather dependent, especially temperature.

MS. KYZER: All right. Any other questions? Q Yes, I've got a question actually. General, this is Master Sergeant Mike Schmidt (ph) -- (inaudible) -- Public Affairs.

GEN. SPRYNCZNATYK: Yes, Sergeant.

Q Yes, sir. I was wondering, this event here was billed as a reach out to military bloggers and to bloggers itself. I'm just wondering who you hope to reach out to through speaking with bloggers and through things like your website where you have stories posted on the flooding.

GEN. SPRYNCZNATYK: Well, Sergeant, I don't know that there is, you know, a particular audience in mind. I view the blogging community, the Internet, you know, as just tools and means to, you know, get the word out to whomever. You know, I think, myself, I've got a background in public affairs. And you know, my first six years in the National Guard I was in a Public Information detachment. I just feel it's vitally important that, you know, the public, you know, in every instance has access to information, to accurate information, to, you know, news stories of what's, you know, taking place.

And I guess, you know, in response to your question, you know, when I was asked if I wanted to participate in this, I didn't see a particular audience in mind. I just feel that anything we can do to, you know, to get the word out and, in this instance, you know, the good news, you know, and the successes that we achieved I think it's very important for people to hear that and to read that and to know that.

Q Well, thank you, sir.

MS. KYZER: Any final questions?

Q Actually, this is Beth from Homefront In Focus, and I do have two quick ones. General, how long do you expect these units to remain activated? That's question number one.

GEN. SPRYNCZNATYK: Okay. We've already begun to -- we sent the South Dakota folks home today. There were 300-and-some of those soldiers. Others have been released. You know, what I told our task force commander, and I know this is always the case, I said, if you have individuals that have situations at home and need to get back to school, need to get back to the job, you know, just consider them on a case-by-case basis. So I know there have been some that have been released. Where we actually activated a whole unit, we're being a little more cautious there because I don't want -- you know, right now, I think we still have -- well, I know we have over 2,000 soldiers and airmen who continue to, you know, to be a part of the state active duty mission. I expect in the coming days, by the weekend, that number might very well be down to, you know, 12(00) or 1,300. I don't know that for a fact. My staff is still, you know, planning. And you know, they're going to come back to me this afternoon with their managed plan for drawdown. And we've got to remember, you know, we've got the second crest coming, and we still have other communities that haven't even seen the first.

And for some, that will be another week.

Q That's what I was wondering in light of the second wave. Another quick question in regard to the rummage sale for sand. This is the first time that I've seen these 100-ton sandbags used. Is this a first, or I've just never seen it before?

GEN. SPRYNCZNATYK: Well, to begin with, they're one ton.

Q Oh, that's right -- one ton. I'm so sorry. I'm giving you even bigger play here. Okay, one ton.

GEN. SPRYNCZNATYK: One-ton sandbags. I don't know for sure. I've heard that they may have been used elsewhere. You know, here's how that came about in North Dakota. You know, I told some of my aviators, my Black Hawk pilots and crews, I said, we need a way to, you know, quickly place 80 to 100 sandbags. And you know, that's typically a pallet of sandbags. And we need to be able to move them quickly from a stockpile, by air, you know, into areas that may be, you know, inaccessible for whatever reason. And they came back to me about two hours later, and they said, Spry, we've got an idea, what do you think? And they said, you know, some of our guys are familiar with these plastic, nylon, reinforced bags that are used to ship soybeans overseas. They hold 2,200 pounds of soybeans. And if you can imagine it, they're kind of shaped like an onion. You know, you've got the bulb at the bottom and then there's a neck up to the top where they're filled. And then, you know, they're cinched up, and that's how soybeans are shipped. And they said, you know, we think we could put 2,000 pounds of sand in one of these and, you know, cinch it up, use a cabling system and a rig from the helicopter to just pick it up, move it and place it.

And I said, hey, that's a fantastic idea, let's try it. And they did, and it worked beautifully. So I think part of the message there is simply, you know, we want our people to be creative and innovative as we take on a mission, and that's exactly what they did in this case. And you know, I don't know if

you've seen any of the video or anything, but it's a big, white bag full of a ton of sand, and then they place them, you know, wherever they need to.

And again, you know, we work with the community, and the community tells us, you know, what they need. And then we figure out how to get it done. I was just being facetious about the rummage sale.

Q I know. (Laughs.) I know. I was thinking some sandbox for that sand. My last question is in regards to the EMAC. Can you just speak to a little bit about how that works?

GEN. SPRYNCZNATYK: Well, to begin with, it works beautifully. We have a requirement that's beyond our capability, and we can go out electronically through EMAC, and it goes out to all 50 fifty states belong to the EMAC. Yeah, I think Hawaii joined. Yes, I believe that's true. But all 50 states -- I think the, you know, the territories and the District of Columbia belong to it. It's broadcast throughout the Guard, throughout emergency services within each of the states. Anybody that has the resources, you know, to meet the requirement can respond back and say, you know, here's what we've got. As I said earlier, when do you need us? You know, where do you want us?

And then, you know, the arrangements are already in place for how the cost of responding in another state is taken care of. So then what will happen in the case of these six states that provided resources and personnel, you know, when they get back home and they figure out what their cost was, the cost to pay their soldiers, their airmen, the cost for the equipment, they send that to North Dakota, and then we reimburse them. So you know, the compact is something that's in place. And you know, all of the hurdles that you might think of if you were trying to do something from scratch have already been dealt with and taken care of by legislative action in each of the states and territories and also approved by the federal government.

So the EMAC, as we call it, is a beautiful tool to provide additional resources to any state or territory in time of need.

Q Thank you so much.

MS. KYZER: Okay. Well, I believe we're right at our 30-minute mark here, so we'll go ahead and wrap up.

Sir, did you have any closing remarks or anything we didn't touch on that you wanted to address?

GEN. SPRYNCZNATYK: Well, I would close by simply saying, you know, thank you for helping us get the word out. We really appreciate that. I am so proud of all of our soldiers and airmen and their families and employers. Our folks have done a tremendous job, and it truly makes me so proud to see what they've done, to see the difference they've made and, to be honest with you, to see the pride in the soldiers and airmen themselves because they know that, you know, they have helped save these communities, helped save lives and property. And you know, they know that they made a difference. And everyone is truly appreciative of that. MS. KYZER: Wonderful. Well, thank you so much, sir. It's been a real pleasure. Thank you for your time. Thank you to the National Guard. And thank you to everyone who joined us on the line today. This concludes the roundtable.

END.

